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MONUMENTAL NOGUCHI SCULPTURE TO BE INSTALLED AT THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

A large, three-part, stone sculpture by the Japanese American artist Isamu Noguchi will be installed outside the north entrance of The Cleveland Museum of Art this week. It will occupy space on both sides of the driveway leading up to the entrance of the Museum's 1970 addition designed by Marcel Breuer. The sculpture has been given to the Museum by the Mildred Andrews Fund and is made from a variegated ochre-colored stone found near Noguchi's home in Japan. When cut and polished the stone turns a dull lustrous black color.

The largest of the three parts, a three and one-half ton piece of stone, will sit atop the grassy knoll encircled by the Museum driveway. The second largest piece, an irregular vertical column about eight feet high, will be placed west of the knoll on the other side of the driveway, while the smallest element will rest horizontally near a tree at the foot of the northwest side of the knoll.

The three pieces were selected by Noguchi for their size, general conformation, and appropriateness for the site. He then cut, carved, ground, and polished sections of each piece so that smooth, near-black surfaces contrast with rough irregularly mottled ochre surfaces. The dark, polished areas provide clear evidence of a human hand and intelligence, while the untouched, ochre-colored parts represent raw nature. Clearly implied is intelligent humanity working in consonance with nature, as opposed to totally controlling or abjectly surrendering to it.

The Cleveland Museum of Art owns two other works by Noguchi. A marble sculpture Woman with Child (1958) and a painted steel model for the monumental sculpture at the Cuyahoga County Justice Center, Portal (1976). In 1979 an exhibition of

(more)

2-noguchi sculpture

Noguchi's work as a landscape architect, theater designer, planner of large-scale public projects, and sculptor was presented at the Museum. Entitled Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes, the exhibition was organized at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis by its director Martin Friedman.

Noguchi describes himself as a traditional sculptor who makes contemporary images. His sculpture is a fusion of modern and historical impulses and Japanese and Western traditions. A major artistic force of the twentieth century, his work exists outside current styles and, like the man, is not easily typed.

Noguchi was born in Los Angeles in 1904 to Yonejiro (Yone) Noguchi, a Japanese poet and Leonie Gilmour, an American writer. His father returned to Japan the same year and Noguchi and his mother followed in 1906. However, the couple soon separated and Noguchi grew up with his mother in the village of Chigasaki, seldom seeing his father. In Japan he attended Japanese and Jesuit schools.

In 1918 Noguchi was sent to Interlaken, an experimental school in Indiana that soon became an Army training camp. He was taken in by the school's founder Dr. Edward Rumely and graduated from the local high school. In 1923 he spent a three month apprenticeship with the sculptor Gutzon Borglum. He enrolled as a premedical student at Columbia University in 1923 and at the same time attended sculpture classes at the Leonardo da Vinci School. From 1923 to 1925 he made and exhibited skillful academic nudes and portraits.

He received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1927 and went to Paris where he became Brancusi's studio assistant and made his first stone carving. In the years 1928 and 29 he produced a series of stone, wood, and sheet metal abstractions influenced by Brancusi and Picasso. He returned to New York in 1929 and exhibited his abstractions in his first one-man exhibition. He then produced a series of financially successful portrait busts.

In 1930 he went to Japan to work with the potter, Uno Jinmatsu. There he developed an interest in prehistoric Japanese art and traditional stone gardens.

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3-noguchi sculpture

He returned to New York in 1931, producing numerous works and exhibiting frequently during the thirties and early forties. A number of unrealized projects were proposed during those years. After Pearl Harbor he spent a painful sojourn as a voluntary internee at a camp for Nisei in the Arizona desert, building parks and playgrounds.

During the 1940s he made a number of stage sets for Martha Graham and produced a series of new and innovative interlocking sculptures. At this time he was somewhat influenced by Surrealism, especially through Roberto Matta. His stage set work continued in the 1950s and '60s as he began to work more with gardens, landscape projects, and large-scale public art. From these two decades come works such as the garden for the Readers Digest headquarters in Tokyo; his father's memorial room and garden at Keio University; the UNESCO gardens in Paris; the garden for the Beinecke Rare Book Library at Yale; the garden for the Israel Museum in Jerusalem; and the garden for the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York.

In the early '60s he established a studio, which he continues to use, in a small factory building in Long Island City, New York and in 1967 he began the practice of working in New York City, Japan, and Italy each year.

During the '70s Noguchi was best known for his large outdoor sculptures; his playground in Atlanta; and designs for an eight acre plaza, fountain, and pylon in Detroit.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Relations Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.